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CURRENT AMERICAN LITERATURE.

They whose knowledge of the lives of men and women in the France of the first half of the sixteenth century is derived from contemporary memoirs may not be altogether edified by the collocation of Margaret of Angoulême in the same series with Susanna Wesley and Harriet Martineau. Doubtless, she, who was Duchess of Alençon and Queen of Navarre, who was, upon the whole, the most conspicuous female figure at the Court of Francis I., and who was the undoubted author of many tales of the *Heptameron*, and the reputed author of them all, may justly be clasified among "famous women." But one aspect of her fame was anything but what the feminine readers of her biography would in our day consider "fair," and the universally credited accounts of her relations with the other sex do not readily adapt themselves to exculpatory and expurgatory treatment. To ascribe to Margaret of Angoulême the stainless reputation, upright instincts, pure thoughts, and refinement of feeling, which are now happily accounted indispensable in women, is to wholly metamorphose her, is to make her something that she neither was, nor cared to be, nor was by her contemporaries wished to be. Better not paint her at all than deliberately falsify the picture. If we see nothing exemplary or savory in the moral standards, customs, manners, and habits of speech of even the most splendid and least odious actors in the Italian and French renaissance, let us not seek for heroines among them. Above all, let us not put in the hands of young girls a book,* which will not only prompt them to read the *Heptameron*, but essays to palliate and condone the rankly offensive features of those too often salacious stories.

The author of "Cathedral Days"† has given us a noteworthy and really useful study of some of the finest achievements of architectural genius in the British Islands, although she speaks of her narrative with genuine humility, and has written it, she tells us, with no other purpose than that of transmitting to others some tincture of the pleasure she herself derived from a tour through Southern England. She evidently knows more about the aims, principles, and processes of medieval architecture than she professes to know, and although she modestly eschews anything like technical or esoteric terms, and shuns the affectation of pedantic familiarity with ogees, ambries, corbels, and crockets, she is capable of making and does make observations, interesting and suggestive to the professional as well as the ordinary reader. There is not a chapter in this book which is devoid of light and charm, but we have been particularly struck by the author's account of the Glastonbury memorials of the old world and of the once splendid but now drooping little burgh of Wells, which is aptly described as "an enchanted city."

When we are reminded that Mr. Poore's acquaintance with Washington reaches back over more than half a century, and consider the opportunities of observation sought after and gained by an indefatigable collector of news, we should expect to find in such a man's reminiscences a magazine of interesting anec-

* Famous Women Series; Margaret of Angoulême by A. Mary F. Robinson. Roberts Brothers.

† Cathedral Days; by Anna Bowman Dodd. Roberts Brothers.

dote and comment. We are not disappointed in the substance of his book,* on which the future historian of the events and scenes here described by an eye-witness will probably draw largely for striking, suggestive, and illuminating details. The author's style, while having no pretensions to extreme literary finish, is fluent and readable; Mr. Poore can tell a story neatly, and depict a person or an incident with a few rapid, telling strokes. Nor should we omit to mention that the publishers have done their share of the work well, contributing, by numerous illustrations of more than average merit, to render the book attractive to a wide audience. We scarcely need say that the volume that is likely to give most pleasure to the present generation of readers is the second, which deals with the quarter of a century beginning in the last year of Mr. Buchanan's administration. The impressions made at the time on an intelligent spectator by the stirring and pregnant events that have taken place in the Federal Capital during the momentous period just named are here delineated with the joint efficiency of a practiced pen and skillful engraving. The prospective usefulness of such a record may be measured, if we reflect how much life and spirit might have been infused into the pages of Bancroft and Hildreth could those writers have availed themselves of similar assistance for the epochs they described.

Few persons who have not themselves tried their hand at it have a just conception of the difficulty of putting a French novel into idiomatic English, which shall satisfy Dryden's definition of a translator's duty to his original, to be "true to his sense, but truer to his fame." The difficulty is, of course, redoubtably enhanced in the case of authors accustomed to think in metaphor and whose analogies and similes take a wide range, and often stray into recondite or technical fields of knowledge or activity. Perhaps the work of no French prose writer, not even Theophile Gautier's, lends itself less tractably to adequate reproduction in English than that of Balzac. Not only, moreover, is his style peculiarly refractory to transplantation, but the vast extent and variety of the ground covered by the novels grouped under the general title of the "*Comédie Humaine*" are calculated to dismay the most accomplished and self-confident translator. It is, therefore, hard to speak, except in terms of superlative satisfaction, of the American translation of Balzac's novels which is now in course of publication. The particular volume† of the series which now lies before us, the version of *Le Médecin de campagne*, is a memorable example of what translation ought to be. In the first place, it is a faithful transcript of the original, faithful not only to the nicest shades of meaning, but to the play, the color, the analytic subtlety, the infused emotion, the nervous energy of Balzac's diction. Secondly, while scrupulously accurate, it is at the same time singularly free from Gallicisms; it is not French-English, but good English, idiomatic, flowing, racy, smacking of the soil and hitting the nail on the head. We do not mean to say, indeed, that the translator has not shrunk from discarding the crudities and nudities in which Balzac was at times permitted to indulge by the widely different composition of the French novel-reading public. But even what might seem to an American or English ear indelicacies of expression are not utterly excised or utterly denaturalized; they are only, so to speak, par-boiled in a lukewarm paraphrase.

* Perley's *Reminiscences*, or *Sixty Years in the National Metropolis*; by Ben: Perley Poore. Two volumes. Philadelphia, Hubbard Brothers.

† Honoré de Balzac; *The Country Doctor*. Boston, Roberts Brothers.